

THE CRUSADE FOR ALMSHOUSE NURSING

By L. L. DOCK

THOSE of our members who are interested in the almshouse crusade will follow with sympathy the valiant fight now being carried on in Michigan; and others, perhaps not yet awake to it, will become stirred by the knowledge of the conditions that may be found in our supposedly civilized land.

In the middle of January last a committee of tax-paying citizens, accompanied by a visiting nurse and headed by Mrs. Caroline Bartlett Crane, visited the county almshouse of Kalamazoo, and drew up a unanimous report of what they found. The report, as to the condition and care of the sick ran as follows:

1. The sick and the relatively well intermingled, to the discomfort and danger of both.

2. No records kept of treatment of sick. No records of visits by physician. It seems evident that the physician usually calls but about once a week, and, with a yearly salary of one hundred dollars, with seventy-five inmates, most of them sick, the medical attention is, in our opinion, entirely inadequate.

3. No notification to keeper or matron of diseased condition of persons becoming inmates.

4. Large number (probably fourteen) of men, sick and well, crowded together in one side of unsanitary basement, lacking in means of ventilation; one man apparently very ill, in a room removed by another room from the hall, and the small high window stopped with paper or rags so it could not be used for ventilation. All the windows small, and five feet or more from the floor. No window boards anywhere in the institution to prevent direct drafts on beds in case windows were opened. The testimony is that they are not opened at night.

5. A man, apparently very ill with consumption, coughing and raising quantities of sputum, found in a windowless room off of the basement hall, which room is totally dark and without any means of ventilation. This room is painted a dark stone color, and is called "the jail." The man was said to be there because there was no room elsewhere for him.

6. Another aged man in room adjoining, whose only light came from a small window letting into a storm-door inclosure, the door opening, however, into a non-communicating part of the house.

7. No night clothes for any of the men inmates, whether sick or well; they sleep in their underclothing.

8. No attention paid to sick diet.

9. Inmates, whether sick or well, using same filthy roller towel.

10. Total lack of nursing care for cure of disease, alleviation of suffering and for prevention of sickness by contagion and from unsanitary conditions in general.

11. Sick woman locked into remote room, day and night, where it would be difficult or impossible, at least at night, to summon any help.

12. We hold that all of these conditions are unnecessary and that many of them are cruel. This is the more the case since there are several unoccupied beds in sanitary and commodious rooms on the second floor of the institution, where a hospital, with a nurse in charge, might give the sick humane and curative care, while relieving the well of the dangers of constant daily association with them.

The conditions as to the well were equally open to criticism, but for lack of space I will omit that part of the report and quote "As to Children in the Almshouse."

1. Four children were found in the almshouse. It appears that one girl who was sent there last October, a few days before her 13th birthday, has like other children, not been allowed to go out of doors, but has, until about two weeks ago, worked in the basement washing dishes and doing other work, where men inmates are in the constant vicinity. This girl was pregnant on coming to the almshouse, and was sent there because she had a venereal disease. Upstairs she was in unrestrained companionship with the other children, as well as with the older women.

2. The visiting nurse reported the heads of the children and of some of the adults to be infested with lice.

The report then considered the general administration, and concluded by requesting an inquiry into the whole management. As certain political interests were keenly rapped by these justifiable criticisms, the politicians in question attacked Mrs. Crane virulently in the public press, hoping by personal abuse to turn her attention or discredit her. At first, the daily papers, the respectable citizens, and even the clergy, were disposed to remain neutral, but this fearless reformer carried the truth to the public ear so determinedly that their neutrality was overcome. A month later, the controversy still being heated, she explained in detail many of the faults of administration in a public letter to the *Gazette* (February 8) and told the distressing story of the little girl, as follows:

As to the children at the county farm, Mr. Koster says: "We all know it is no place for them, but we can do nothing else, there being no other place to send them under present laws. If there was, our county agent, Mr. Merrell, would see that they were sent there. I wonder if Mrs. Crane would consent to take one of them into her home and care for her until some place could be provided."

Mr. Koster knows that, at the last meeting of the board of supervisors, both Mr. Merrell and myself appeared to call attention to the section of the juvenile court law commanding boards of supervisors in each county in this state, within

ninety days after the law went into effect, to provide and maintain, at public expense, a suitable place of detention, separate from the jail, "located both for convenience of court work and with a view to the healthful physical and moral environment of all children within the provisions of this act." The law further provides that such a place of detention shall be in charge of a matron or other person capable and of good moral character. There is another section of this law which provides that any diseased child within the provisions of the juvenile court law shall be sent for treatment to a hospital, at county expense.

In the light of these facts, it hardly seems that the duty of providing a place for these children rests more heavily on Mrs. Crane than on the board of supervisors, or even the chairman himself. At least it cannot be said that she is to-day in open violation of the law in not having provided a proper place for such children.

However, I did offer to do much better than to take one of these unfortunate children into my home. It was the little girl whose case was described in the committee report above.

I first heard of this girl when she was still confined in jail, and, learning that there was a likelihood of her being taken to the poorhouse, I at once wrote to Professor Cowie of the medical department of Michigan university, asking if it would not be possible to admit her to the free children's ward of the University hospital for treatment of her disease, with the understanding that if she proved to be pregnant, also (the matter being at this time in some doubt), she could be transferred to the maternity ward of the hospital. I have the letter of Professor Cowie saying that the girl might be sent at once.

I immediately informed both the county agent, and one of the poor superintendents, that the girl could be sent to the University hospital. The superintendent of the poor said that the child had not yet been turned over to his care, but that he thought it would be a good plan for her to go to Ann Arbor, and that I might speak to Dr. Shillito, county physician, about it, and if he approved, it would be all right as far as he was concerned. I immediately consulted Dr. Shillito who gave his heartiest approval of the child's being sent to Ann Arbor. I even offered, since I was about to go to Ann Arbor, to take this child myself, without any expense to the county, and see her safely into the hospital, if this would help to get her there.

The next I knew, a few days afterwards, the girl was in the poorhouse, where she has remained since the first week in October, never having been permitted to go out of doors in all that time. When I asked the poor superintendent why he did not send the child to the hospital at Ann Arbor after she was turned over to his care by County Agent Merrell, he said:

"Why, Mrs. Crane, she wasn't fit to go to a hospital. You don't know what a bad girl she is." Apparently she was not thought unfit, morally or physically, to associate freely with all the other children there, or to be in constant daily contact with the men in and about the basement kitchen. It would seem that this child was, in effect, sentenced without trial to the poorhouse because of her alleged character. Perhaps I am in error in holding that our poorhouse is not a penal institution!

Justice compels me to say that I do not regard the poor superintendent as alone responsible, yet it was clearly in his power to have sent this poor wronged child to a hospital, and he chose to send her to the poorhouse instead. It did not seem to me that any little girl whom life has used so terribly, is to be con-

demned as "bad," and denied all opportunity and incentive to be better. I know that when I spoke a few kind words to her that day at the poorhouse, she threw her arms around my neck and sobbed, and tried to tell me something which showed that she was not past being reached by good influences, such as would have been thrown around her in the University hospital. There, no one's estimate of her character would have stood in the way of the best help the state could have given a child so terribly sinned against as she had been, and then consigned to the tender mercies of jail and poorhouse.

This child stated, to our visiting nurse, that she had never had any medical treatment whatever since she had been in the almshouse, where she was sent because she could not enter a state juvenile institution until she was cured!

Conditions such as these go far to show why women—intelligent and able women, not servile ones, should have, not only *positions* in such institutions, but a share of *power*, so that these evils, all of which lie strictly in the sphere of *housekeeping* and *nursing*,—two spheres which have always been lauded as women's own—might not occur. How I wish that our women's eyes everywhere might be opened to realize that only by possessing their rightful share of our municipal and state and national government can they ever hope to claim their right and their duty of carrying the standards of good homes into public institutions. What selfishness to think only of one's *own* home! Well might Mrs. Crane entitle one of her public talks "*The Wrong of Minding One's Own Business.*"

LESSONS IN DIETETICS

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(Continued from page 448)

THEA, TEA

TEA was introduced into Europe by the Dutch East India Company in 1610. On account of its high price, it was used sparingly at first, but as it has been grown more cheaply, its use has been greatly increased. Until 1862, tea was mostly obtained from China, but it is now grown in Japan, Ceylon and North Carolina as well. Its use in this country has been estimated to reach six pounds annually, per person. The plant flushes, or sends out young shoots, four times in the year, and is picked at each flush. In China and Japan the best tea is obtained from the first flushing, but in India and Ceylon this is not the case. The